

# Wealthy bird collectors shun efforts to breed rare macaw

From Herald Staff and Wire Reports

WASHINGTON — A handful of millionaire bird collectors around the world are turning a deaf ear to the mating call of the last Spix's macaw left in the wild.

Because having such a bird is comparable to owning a Rembrandt, they have refused to contribute their Spix's macaws, illegally captured in Brazil's rain forest, to a breeding program that might pull the species back from the brink of extinction.

The exact number of caged Spix's macaws — a blue parrot-like bird whose feathers sparkle in the sun — is unknown today, but in 1989 there were 26.

"Only the filthy rich have them. And they won't share them," says Richard Schubot, an expert in exotic bird breeding and co-owner of the Parrot Jungle and Gardens in Miami. "The important thing here is that they are going extinct."

He said the birds, if they were available, could be sold for \$60,000 a pair. "But it wouldn't be worth buying them, because if one of them died, you'd never be able to replace it because nobody would sell you one legally or illegally," he said.

Donald Bruning, a New York Zoological Society ornithologist who is trying to start the breeding program, said the collectors "want to be the only ones having them and breeding them."

The Spix's macaw's beauty, according to Bill Ziegler, general curator at Metrozoo, is what



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**SPIX'S MACAW: JUST ONE IS KNOWN TO REMAIN IN WILD.**

makes it prized. "Its picture can't do it justice, it's a really spectacular sight. In the sun, the sheen looks iridescent." Ziegler saw one in captivity in the 1970s. He said he has since lost track of the owner.

The Spix's, about 22 inches from head to tail, was never numerous because it comes from a tiny pocket of the rain forest, but its numbers show the dramatic effect collecting has had on many species of parrot, macaw and cockatoo in the wild, Bruning said.

In the 1960s, there were at least 150 Spix's macaws in the wild

and eight captive. In 1980, 50 remained wild and 17 were captive. By 1985, 45 had been captured and only three remained wild. By 1989, the Spix's was thought to be extinct in the forest while 26 were held by private collectors. None are in zoos.

One wild Spix's has since been found. That lonesome creature may be the most closely watched bird in the world.

Its sex is not known.

Bruning, in his efforts to get a breeding program started, would like Brazil to demand that collectors return the birds.

Efforts to trace the 26 birds, which are presumably still healthy and squawking lusty *kraa-arks* in their fancy cages, have been difficult. The birds can live up to 40 years.

"We know there are a couple in England, but the guy denies he has them. He says it's a friend who has them," Bruning said.

A Philippine collector with seven of the birds wants to start his own captive-breeding program. One surfaced in Switzerland. Several are in Brazil and their owners are on a government commission to decide the fate of the bird.

"At the same time, there is a fellow in Tenerife who is doing everything he can to get more," Bruning said.

He noted that the Spix's story is only one of the more dramatic tales of how bird collection — in addition to destruction of habitat — has pushed threatened species to extinction or perilously close.